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Sherry Wallace  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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## IWU Professor Receives Record-Setting Grant

April 3, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University Associate Professor of Chemistry Ram Mohan has received a \$380,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to continue his groundbreaking work on green chemistry. It is the largest grant in the history of the chemistry department.

The fact that NSF bestowed the grant is unique, said Mohan. "It is extremely unusual for a four-year school to receive a renewal grant," he said. "The grants typically go to larger, research schools." The money is a renewal grant for Mohan's research. He received a \$205,000 grant in 2003.

The grant is particularly exciting for Illinois Wesleyan, because it will enable Mohan to create a post-doctorate research fellowship, the first for the University. "We are delighted that a postdoctoral researcher will be joining Dr. Mohan's team," said Rebecca Roesner, IWU chemistry department chair. "This highly trained associate will allow Dr. Mohan to extend his research in new directions."

Mohan, a member of the IWU faculty since 1996, works to discover environmentally friendly processes for chemists to use at pharmaceutical and other companies. "We do not create the life-saving drugs or the pesticides," said Mohan. "We develop the processes that can be used to make products in a way that will not harm the environment."

The search for earth-friendly ways to create products has been a goal of Mohan for the last eight years. "It's ironic that people created life-savings drugs and useful plastics, and no one paid attention to how we got there. In the past, anti-cancer drugs would be created using cancer-causing materials," he said. "Now we are making efforts to make the process more compatible with the environment."

Currently, Mohan and his team of eight undergraduate students are working with bismuth compounds. "Bismuth is one of the least toxic metals," said Mohan. "Say a company has eight steps to create an anti-cancer drug, and step three is damaging to the environment. Our research makes them ask, 'Can we use bismuth in step three?'" Mohan likes to point out that most people know how tame bismuth is by the anti-acid that bears its name, PEPTO-BISMOL.

Justin Ernat, a senior chemistry major from Oglesby, Ill., is one of the students on Mohan's team. "I think it's important that we are helping people envision safer ways of conducting research," he said.

The concept of green chemistry is taking hold in many industries, said Mohan. "It is impractical and a little ridiculous to say you simply want to ban chemicals," he said. "But it is realistic to replace the toxic chemicals with non-toxic ones and replace harmful processes with those that are benign to the environment."

IWU offers Mohan a unique opportunity to combine two of his loves—research and teaching. "I could have gone to a bigger school, but I admired that Illinois Wesleyan supports research while valuing teaching."

The work of Mohan and his team will continue. "I've always had an interest in the environment," said Mohan. "I hope we all have a desire to make the world a little more habitable."

For more information about the grant, or Mohan's work, contact Sherry Wallace in University Communications at (309) 556-3792.

*A graduate of Hansraj College in Delhi, India, Mohan holds a master's degree in organic chemistry from the University of Delhi and a Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He conducted postdoctoral research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Mohan was the 2002 winner of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Distinguished Alumnus Award and a 2001 winner of the national Henry Dreyfus Teacher-Scholar Award.*



Ram Mohan

Contact: Sherry Wallace, (309) 556-3792